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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VILNIUS 000457

SIPDIS

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TAGS: AF LH MARR MOPS NATO PREL

SUBJECT: LITHUANIA'S STRATEGIC PLANS FOR AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. VILNIUS 194

1B. VILNIUS 188

1C. VILNIUS 172

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DAMIAN LEADER, FOR REASO NS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (U) Summary. The GOL recently prepared a new national strategy on its activities in Afghanistan which would extend the current mandate for troops on the ground through the end of 2013. The Parliament will take a decision on extending the mandate during its Fall session. The GOL continues to struggle with funding its development projects and continues to seek USG assistance in lining up donors; officials have put down a few markers that the GOL's ability to continue running the Ghor PRT may be at risk unless finances improve. The GOL is planning to host an RC West Conference in Vilnius in December and a Donor Conference for Ghor Province in the Spring. End summary.

Afghanistan Commitment

12. (C) We met with MFA's Chief Counselor Valdemaras Sarapinas on August 21 to discuss next steps in Afghanistan. Sarapinas said that the GOL recently prepared a new national strategy on activities in Afghanistan through the end of 2013 using strategy papers from the U.S., UK, Denmark and Sweden as models. The MFA drafted the strategy paper in collaboration with MOD, MOI and MOF. He explained that the strategy document formalizes already established plans to extend the current mandate to maintain troops in Afghanistan from the end of 2010 until the end of 2013. Sarapinas said that an inter-agency group will also prepare an implementation plan for the strategy. The GOL and the Parliament (Seimas) will take a final decision on the Afghanistan strategy and extending the mandate during the Parliament's Fall session, which begins September 10. When asked if he thought the Afghanistan strategy would be approved, Sarapinas was optimistic; "I have no doubts, frankly speaking."

Development Projects

13. (SBU) Sarapinas said that the GOL continues to search for donors for its development projects in Afghanistan,

in particular the renovation of the Chaghcharan airport, as well as a road from Herat to Kabul and renovations of a local hospital and a children's care center. Sarapinas was encouraged that Japanese civil experts now are working at the PRT. In a separate meeting in early August with Virginija Umbrasiene, head of the programs and projects division of the MFA's Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Department, we learned that the GOL continues to seek additional funding from various nations to pave the runway at Chaghcharan airport to a thickness sufficient to handle C-130 aircraft. Umbrasiene said the Afghan Ministry of Finance wrote to the Abu Dhabi Development Fund on August 9 seeking its financial support for the project, and she said the GOL has urged the Afghan government to write a similar letter to the World Bank. She said the GOL would welcome USG letters of support to both the Abu Dhabi Development Fund and the World Bank.

¶4. (SBU) In addition, Sarapinas said that Foreign Minister Usackas discussed development projects with his counterparts in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan and received encouraging responses; USG approaches to both countries could help Lithuania's efforts, according to Sarapinas. He inquired about the possibility of USAID and / or Commander's Emergency Response funding from the U.S. Lastly he asked if the U.S. could send civil specialists such as police, doctors and budget analysts to the region.

¶5. (SBU) Umbrasiene said the GOL, because it is a government, has limited its direct contacts to state actors and international organizations such as the World Bank and

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the Asian Development Bank. She said the GOL has not approached NGOs or other potential private donors or even thought about doing so, but is open to the possibility of taking such steps to help fund development projects. She asked for U.S. advice on identifying and approaching such sources.

Continued Coordination with Allies

¶5. (C) Sarapinas said that the GOL plans to host two conferences to discuss Afghanistan strategy. The GOL will host an RC West Conference in Vilnius this Winter (potentially December 7-8). Sarapinas envisions the conference as an opportunity to discuss past achievements, future priorities and increased civilian participation in Afghanistan. He suggested that a high level USG representative from DOS or DOD could deliver the keynote speech. The GOL will also coordinate, together with the Governor of Ghor province, a Ghor Donor Conference in Kabul or in Chaghcharan. Sarapinas said the GOL would likely hold the conference in the Spring although the end of October / beginning of November is also a possibility. In preparation for the conference, GOL representatives are working with local government representatives in Ghor to expand the current provincial development plan which is now just a "wish list."

If Funding Doesn't Come?

¶6. (C) Despite the GOL's commitment to stay in Afghanistan through 2013, there have been some unmistakable hints that Lithuania needs help if it is to follow through on that commitment. President Grybauskaite on August 25 told NATO SecGen GFogh Rasmussen that Lithuania is committed to ISAF, but added that "efforts to guarantee operations of the (Ghor PRT) requires closer cooperation among allies to come up with additional funding." The President's NSA-equivalent told Charge August 20 that the President is committed to Afghanistan (and plans to visit next Spring) but that budget

cuts are brutal. Afghanistan is costing the GOL several times more than the appropriation for all MFA and diplomatic expenses next year. If economic pressures get worse in 2010, Semaska said Lithuania may have to "revisit our commitment."

¶ 17. (C) Semaska said Lithuania's SOF accounts for 25% of Afghan expenses, and the PRT 75%. He asked Charge which is the more important of the two missions, if Lithuania had to choose? Charge replied that both are important, that ISAF is a NATO operation which is in Lithuania and the EU's interest as much as the U.S.'s interest, that it is about building a safer, more stable Afghanistan that is not an exporter of terrorism as it was in 2001. Semaska agreed, and concluded by reiterating that Lithuania is committed to Afghanistan, and hoped that the budget situation would not worsen in 2010.

Next Steps

¶ 18. (C) Comment. The GOL's continued commitment to Afghanistan in spite of serious budget cuts is commendable. However, PRT operations remain the priority for the GOL's dwindling funds, with little left for development projects. Unfortunately, the GOL's inexperience with raising development funds continues to limit forward progress on these projects. Although the GOL has made some progress in the last few months in approaching potential donors, it has yet to close the deal on any significant funding. The proposed donors' conference is a potentially welcome step, though we suspect the GOL will seek USG and other assistance in order to organize it.

¶ 19. (C) In addition to the GOL's lack of follow-through with potential donors, another obstacle is the potential hesitancy of some sponsors to fund projects in the comparatively peaceful province of Ghor. The GOL argues that

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Ghor's relative peace is precarious, and could be threatened if the people of Ghor feel that their province is being overlooked. The GOL does not want to give the people of Ghor province a reason to ally themselves with destabilizing groups. End comment.

¶ 110. (U) Action request: As noted above, the GOL continues to seek USG assistance as it solicits funding for its development projects. Post would welcome Washington views on possible USG support, including for a potential donors' conference. We have forwarded to EUR/NB a copy of the Afghan Government letter to the Abu Dhabi Development Fund, and will seek a copy of any similar letter to the World Bank.

LEADER